

Mayor's Update

Financial Relief for Taxpayers

I have been carefully monitoring legislation filed by Governor Baker to help residents face the financial challenges of the COVID-19 epidemic. I am pleased to report that the legislation has now passed both houses of the Massachusetts Legislature and the Governor signed the bill this afternoon.



This legislation allows me to take several actions to allow residents more time to pay their taxes and other municipal fees and to do so without incurring late fees and/or penalties. I will be taking the following actions in the coming days:

Quarter 4 Property Tax Bills

I will extend the due date of the 4th quarter property tax bills from May 1 to June 1, the last day allowed by the legislation.

Property Tax Exemptions and Deferrals

I will extend the deadline for filing applications for property tax exemptions and property tax deferrals from April 1 to June 1, 2020, again the last date allowed.

Excise Taxes, Betterment Assessments, Water/Sewer Bills

I will waive the payment of interest and other penalties on late payments that were due after March 10, 2020 and paid before June 30, 2020, for any excise tax, betterment assessment, water or sewer bill, or other charge added to a tax.

My goal with these actions is to help Newtonians experiencing financial hardship during these difficult times.

Testing Site Opens

The Chestnut Hill Mall/Simons and One Medical (a comprehensive primary care practice) opened an outdoor COVID-19 testing site at the Chestnut Hill Mall this afternoon.

They approached me, Commissioner of Health and Human Services Deb Youngblood, and Emergency Management Director Bruce Proia a few days ago and we reviewed detailed plans from a number of perspectives (vehicular/traffic and parking implications, public health, public safety, police), and asked for a number of modifications with which they complied.

I believe that expanding the amount of testing is a critical need right now in our efforts to slow the spread of COVID-19.

Here is more detailed information:

- The appointments will initially occur in 10 -minute intervals, and the tests themselves only take 5-7 minutes each.
- This service will be available to members of One Medical only at first, with two important exceptions. City of Newton first responders and essential Emergency Support personnel not working remotely will also be allowed to be tested AND City of Newton residents can sign up to join One Medical for free for one month and be able to be tested if they meet the testing criteria. To find out more about joining One Medical, call a membership advisor at 1-888-ONE-MED1 and press 2 to get assistance. (Please note, the City of Newton is not recommending One Medical but rather letting you know that they are offering this free trial period.)
- There will be a limit of 50 tests per day. In addition to space for the 10' x 20' with a desk, parking for 1-2 additional cars for a short patient queue is set up.
- One Medical is intent on protecting the health of its employees and the public. One Medical is working closely with the Newton Police Department and the State Police for safety and security measures during deployment of the drive up and walk up testing services, including a police detail(s); additionally, there are Site Safety Plans (SSPs) designed, implemented and communicated to the team members on the front lines to ensure contingencies to support the safety of employees, members and the community.
- Hours of operation: By appointment only; 9:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Monday through Friday.

Current Cases

As of 6:00 p.m. today, Friday, April 3, the Newton Department of Health and Human Services has had 127 people test positive for COVID-19. Yesterday the number was 108. We continue to experience significant increases; last Friday, we had 47 reported positive cases.

We update the information on positive cases in Newton regularly at newtonma.gov/covid19.

Massachusetts updates the statewide information daily [here](#).

Face Coverings

Late this afternoon, the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) announced a new recommendation to wear cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are hard to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies).

The CDC recommendation reads:

“CDC continues to study the spread and effects of the novel coronavirus across the United States. We now know from recent studies that a significant portion of individuals with coronavirus lack symptoms (“asymptomatic”) and that even those who eventually develop symptoms (“pre-symptomatic”) can transmit the virus to others before showing symptoms. This means that the virus can spread between people interacting in close proximity — for example, speaking, coughing, or sneezing

— even if those people are not exhibiting symptoms. In light of this new evidence, CDC recommends wearing cloth face coverings in public settings where other social distancing measures are difficult to maintain (e.g., grocery stores and pharmacies) especially in areas of significant community-based transmission.

It is critical to emphasize that maintaining 6-feet social distancing remains important to slowing the spread of the virus. CDC is additionally advising the use of simple cloth face coverings to slow the spread of the virus and help people who may have the virus and do not know it from transmitting it to others. Cloth face coverings fashioned from household items or made at home from common materials at low cost can be used as an additional, voluntary public health measure.

The cloth face coverings recommended are not surgical masks or N-95 respirators. Those are critical supplies that must continue to be reserved for healthcare workers and other medical first responders, as recommended by current CDC guidance.”

Newton COVID-19 Care Fund is Open

Thanks to the incredible work of the United Way and Family ACCESS, and many behind the scenes partners and generous donors, significant funding has been raised and the application process is open to assist those financially impacted by COVID-19 in Newton.

This fund is open anyone who meets one of the criteria:

- Newton residents
- Families with children attending Newton public schools
- Families with children enrolled in Newton childcare
- People who work in Newton
- City of Newton First Responders who incur new childcare expenses or expenses as a result of the crisis

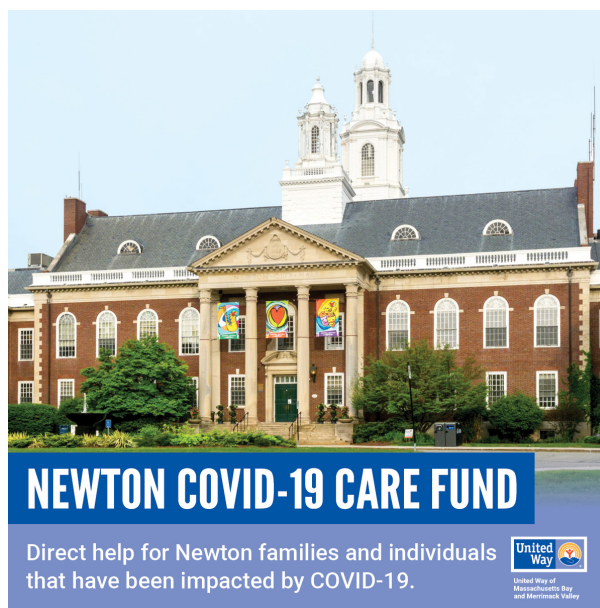
The funding is available for basic needs, including rent/mortgage, childcare, health care, utilities, or other immediate needs. The application asks for documentation of the need and also of the change in income in the home. Please apply; so many people here in Newton have had and are anticipated to have significant setbacks due to the pandemic. The people reviewing the applications at Family ACCESS - want to make this fund as accessible as possible.

You can find more information and apply for assistance [here](#).

You can get more information and donate [here](#).

Remember, there are a lot of great non-profits helping Newtonians. For more opportunities to get some help and/or to make a donation, click [here](#).

Newton Public Schools and Distance Learning



Newton Public School students on Monday will begin a formal distance-learning curriculum with a structured weekly schedule that teachers created for their classes.

Over the past weeks since the schools closed, principals and teachers have reached out to students and provided learning opportunities as they, along with Superintendent David Fleishman and a planning team of curriculum coordinators/department heads, special education administrators and technology staff worked to reimagine school with physical distancing.

In a letter to the school community, the Superintendent yesterday wrote, “The distance-learning curriculum created by NPS will keep our students connected to their peers, their teachers, and the trusted adults they have come to know and love in our school communities. It will keep them engaged in learning in meaningful ways, while also recognizing limits on the content we will be able to cover in this environment. Finally, it acknowledges the wide variety of circumstances that our families and our staff find themselves in right now and seeks to balance moving instruction forward and maintaining the social and emotional health of students, staff, and families.”

Read his entire letter to NPS families [here](#). Learn more about distance learning [here](#).

The distance-learning curriculum takes advantage of extensive use of video-conferencing. NPS has developed guides for families and students; read them [here](#).

Newton Public Schools have distributed more than 600 devices to students who need to access the distance-learning curriculum. Distribution of devices will continue to help students who do not have access to any device at home. For more information, visit the NPS COVID-19 page [here](#). A big thank you to the Newton Schools Foundation for a recent grant to support the purchase of additional devices to support distance learning.

Grab ‘n Go meals continue to be available for all students to pick up daily from 10:00 a.m. to noon, Monday through Friday, at Newton North and Newton South High Schools, with about 40 at South and 50 at North being picked up on a typical day. For more information about the Grab ‘n Go program and other food resources, click [here](#).

Updates on Major Projects

While it is not exactly business as usual, the City Council and the Planning Department have adapted quickly and modified its processes to continue to serve us during this health crisis.

The City Council and the Planning Department are using digital submissions for proposed permits and Councilors and staff are working closely via Zoom virtual meetings with applicants, Boards and Commission members, and members of the public. With the Zoom link for meetings (available on all the online agendas), anyone through their smart phone or personal computer can see, hear, and participate in scheduled Council, Board and Commission hearings. The City now has a Zoom license to accommodate up to 1,000 users at a given public meeting. I would urge you to jump in to one of the meetings by clicking on the Zoom meeting link and check it out for yourself. You could also participate by just calling on your phone and hearing the live audio. (The phone also has a function allowing you to weigh in during public comment.) Don’t forget, Newton’s NewTV is live broadcasting the virtual video and audio for many of the City Council meetings.

There are a slew of major projects before the City Council and the Zoning Board of Appeals right now. Here's a quick synopsis and information on how to participate.

Riverside Special Permit

The City Council Land Use Committee is continuing the analysis of the proposed mixed-use development project at the Riverside MBTA parking lot and adjacent Indigo Hotel on Grove Street at its Land Use Public Hearings. The current proposal includes 582 units of housing (87 of which would be at permanently affordable rents), 253,828 square feet of office space, a 150-room hotel, and 38,895 square feet of retail space. Weigh in at the next public hearing focusing on transportation issues on Tuesday, April 7th at 7:00 p.m. Find more information on the project [here](#).

Dunstan East Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) is continuing its analysis of the proposed mixed-use development project on 2.98 acres of property along Washington Street on the east side of Dunstan Street in West Newton. The current proposal includes 244 rental units (61 of which would be at permanently affordable rents) and 12,521 square feet of ground floor retail space. The Planning Department and its two consultant peer reviewers are continuing to analyze the proposal. Speak up at the next public hearing before the Zoning Board of Appeals on Wednesday, April 22nd at 7:00 p.m. Find more information on the proposed project [here](#).

Riverdale Chapter 40B Comprehensive Permit

The Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) is also continuing its analysis of the proposed mixed-use development project on 3.4 acres at 15 Riverdale Avenue off of California Street in Nonantum. The project consists of 204 residential units (51 of which would be at permanently affordable rents) and 7,000 square feet of retail, community, and amenity space. The next public hearing before the Zoning Board of Appeals is scheduled for Wednesday, May 6th at 7:00 p.m. Find more information on the proposed project [here](#).

1114 Beacon Street Special Permit

The City Council Land Use Committee (LUC) is continuing its analysis of a proposed 27-unit multi-family development at the site of a former restaurant in Four Corners near the intersection with Walnut Street. The next public hearing date has yet to be scheduled. For more information about the proposed project [here](#).

1158 Beacon Street "Union Twist" Retail Marijuana Special Permit

The City Council Land Use Committee (LUC) is continuing its analysis of a proposed retail marijuana store at 1158 Beacon Street in Four Corners, near the intersection with Walnut Street and just past the 27-unit multi-family development described above. The Planning Department's peer reviewer has completed its initial review of this proposal for a 2,290 square foot marijuana retailer. The petitioner has indicated they will likely make some modifications to address concerns related to site access. The next public hearing date has yet to be scheduled at the Land Use Committee. Find more information about the proposed project [here](#).

Zoning Redesign

The City Council Zoning and Planning Committee (ZAP) is hard at work spending

time at each meeting looking at case studies using the new draft Zoning Ordinance. The ZAP Committee meets the second and fourth Monday at 7:00 p.m. with their next meeting scheduled for Monday, April 13th. Find more information about Zoning Redesign [here](#).

Draft Fiscal Years 2021-2025 Consolidated Plan and Draft Fiscal Year 2021 Annual Action Plan

Interested in how the City of Newton and the 13-community WestMetro HOME Consortium, of which Newton is the lead entity, will provide critical services like mental health care, crisis prevention, youth and elderly programming, childcare, family support, affordable housing and employment opportunities for developmentally disabled persons? Take a look at the draft Annual Action Plan that lays out the Community Development Block Grant (CDBG), HOME Investment Partnerships Program (HOME), and Emergency Solutions Grant (ESG) funded projects. These projects will be undertaken over the course of the upcoming fiscal year (July 1, 2020-June 30, 2021) as part of the goals and strategies outlined in the draft FY21-25 Consolidated Plan. On Monday, April 6 at 7:00 pm, the Planning & Development Board will hold a public hearing on the draft FY21-25 Consolidated Plan and draft FY21 Annual Action Plan. We are looking for feedback to ensure federal grant funds effectively assist low- and moderate-income residents in Newton and the WestMetro HOME Consortium. Find information on these draft plans [here](#).

Warmly,

Ruthanne

P.S. The Massachusetts Registry of Motor Vehicles has extended registration deadlines for 60 days. All passenger and dealer plate registrations that expired in March have been extended until May 31. Registrations that expire in April have been extended until June 30. A limited number of RMV locations remain open for appointment only services (no walk-ins allowed). More information can be found [here](#).

P.P.S. Interested in cooking or gardening? Check out The Newton Community Farm's online classes on YouTube under Newton Community Farm 2020. The programs run live on Mondays (cooking), Wednesdays (gardening), and Fridays (story time) at 1:00 p.m. – or tune in anytime to watch a recorded show. Click [here](#) for more information.

